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From: MINELRES moderator <office@g...> (by way of Greek Helsinki Monitor
<office@g...>)**Date:** Tue Apr 10, 2001 12:47pm**Subject:** The 30th Romani National Day: 8 April 2001

From: MINELRES moderator <minelres@m...>

Original sender: Ariel Eliyahu <eli-ari@i...>

Subject: The 30th Romani National Day: 8 April 2001

THE 30th ROMANI NATIONAL DAY: 8 April 2001

Ilona Klimova, Cambridge University

E-mail: <iklimova@h...>

Last July, the prominent Czech daily Mlada Fronta Dnes gave full-page coverage to the 5th World Romani Congress taking place in Prague, announcing in a headline: "We are a nation, the Roma declare to the world" (23 July 2000). This Congress for the first time publicized the claim of the Roma to national status. Within a few days similar slogans echoed through major newspapers in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. The new message conveyed by the President of the International Romani Union, Emil Scuka, clearly goes against the common 'gypsy stereotype' which presents the world's Roma as a backward deviant group, contesting and rejecting the norms and values of modern societies, resisting integration and having no interest in participation in political life. Using the post-modern discourse of individual human rights and globalization, Scuka declared among other things that the Roma want the following (Corriere della Sera, 4 December 2001):

- to participate in the international society and in its quest for the improvement of peoples lives based on fundamental democratic principles;
- to live like everyone else and with everyone else, regardless of nationality, religion or language, in a symbiotic system in which diverse nations aim to integrate through common institutions and rules without trying to assimilate each other;
- not to be just passive participants, rather, to help in the creation of new and proper norms, institutions and forms of coexistence in an organised global society founded on the rule of law.

Although unknown to most, the idea of the Romani nation and the

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struggle for political participation are not new phenomena. Romani leaders have long tried to enter mainstream politics in order to improve the situation of their people but have found it impossible, with some notable recent exceptions (currently there are 5 Romani MPs in various European countries, some 20 Romani mayors and about 400 Romani local councilors; until recently there was also a Spanish Romani MP in the European Parliament). As a result of their marginalization (and until recently in many countries even legal exclusion) from mainstream politics, the Roma have started to develop alternative transnational Romani politics. In order to find a niche for themselves within the framework of a world dominated by nation-states, Romani elites for decades have been engaged in the process of nation-building through their own political and cultural mobilization. This cultural mobilization has included the promotion of folklore, festivals, and education, as well as of publications in the Romani language and language standardization. Their political mobilization gained momentum with the First World Romani Congress, held in London in 1971. This Congress adopted the self-appellation Roma, the blue and green flag embossed with the red Ashok Chakra (the Indian wheel symbolizing perpetual life), and the Romani anthem, We Traveled On (Djelem, Djelem). It also decided that the opening day of the Congress - 8 April - should become Romani National Day. The movement has grown stronger throughout the years and this past World Romani Congress brought about the formation of a state-like structure with its own constitution, embryonic government, parliament and diplomatic corps.

The Romani National Day has been marked more widely each year by cultural events and parades in various countries. This year's special 30-year Jubilee promises to be the greatest manifestation yet for recognition and rights of the Romani Nation. Events coordinated between many Romani groups and organizations in Europe, North and South America and Australia are to take place in over 150 towns and cities around the globe. Unlike the purely cultural spirit of the celebrations in the past 30 years, the 30th Romani National Day has a more radical political expression signified by the use of the term 'Ustiben' (Rising) and the staging of 'The March of 100,000.' This idea came as a response to an appeal by Roma ethnically cleansed from Kosovo, some 80,000 of whom were forced to flee their homes during the war in the province and are now scattered as refugees around Europe. The main thrust is for recognition of the Roma as a non-territorial nation with the right to a seat in the UN General Assembly, as well as the observance of human rights for Romani people, not to mention equality, an end to racial attacks, better treatment for Romani refugees worldwide, protection and safe return for Roma of Kosovo, and an end to the recent violence in Macedonia. The whole event also celebrates Romani brotherhood, unity, culture and nationhood and testifies to solidarity between diverse Romani communities for the purposes of political cooperation.

The main event prepared for the Romani National Day and Ustiben 2001 is a rally outside the UN in New York in support of Point 5 of the Warsaw Recommendations to the NGO Forum of the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) calling for the UN to confer "the status of a non-territorial nation to the Romani people, providing for adequate representation in relevant international governmental organizations.[including having] a seat in the United Nations ..[and] elected officials in the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and in the constitutive organs of these organizations." For full text see

<http://www.hri.ca/racism/meetings/warsaw.htm> The momentum for Roma Nation recognition by the UN, which was taken up by the meeting of the Parliament of the International Romani Union in Bratislava, Slovakia (2-4 March 2001) and by the regional NGO meeting for WCAR in Quito

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10-14 March 2001, and by the regional NGO meeting for women in Quito, Ecuador (13-16 March 2001), is planned to be carried forward to the WCAR in Durban, South Africa at the end of August 2001. April 8 events in other parts of the globe will include a rally in Gent focusing on the situation of Romani refugees and drawing attention to the situation of the Roma of Kosovo; a rally at the Parliament Square in London calling for a Traveler Law Reform Bill, accompanied by a cultural program and academic conferences focusing on the Romani movement at the Universities of Greenwich and Cambridge; a concert in Vienna City Hall; an assembly in Sydney; and major manifestations and cultural events in San Francisco, Toronto, Vancouver, Quito, Bogota, Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia, Skopje, Berlin, Prague, Nis, Subotica, Salonica, and a number of smaller towns. In Prishtina, Kosovo, despite the grave situation, April 8 will be marked by a theater production, a concert, and a reception and speeches, with the full support of the OSCE. Contact details for more information on these events can be obtained at <http://romani.org/ustiben.html> or from Ustibe.n@n...

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